

# KCTCS GOOD NEWS REPORT

HIGHER EDUCATION BEGINS HERE

SEPTEMBER 2011



## KCTCS College Named Top 10 Community College in Nation

**ABOVE:** West Kentucky Community and Technical College Emerging Technology Center is WKCTC's newest facility. It houses the Haas Technology Education Center and offers advanced classes in information technology, mechatronics, robotics, rapid prototyping, metrology, and more.

West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC) has been named one of the top 10 community college finalists by the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program.

"This is an incredible honor for both West Kentucky Community and Technical College and our System," said KCTCS President Michael B. McCall. "WKCTC has realized its goal of being the preeminent community college in the nation and is leading our System in realizing its dream of being a premier community college system."

WKCTC now enters the last stage of the competition for the \$1 million prize fund that will be awarded in December in Washington, D.C., to the first-ever national winner and up to three runners-up.

This is the first national recognition of extraordinary accomplishments at individual community colleges and follows on the April project launch and previous White House Community College Summit that attracted participation and endorsement from President Obama as well as luminaries in American education, labor, business, and civil society.



KENTUCKY COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

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“West Kentucky works hard to make sure students learn and are prepared for jobs, and it shows,” said Josh Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program.

“The number of students who finish their program is climbing. Paducah and the whole state have something to be proud of in West Kentucky Community and Technical College.”

WKCTC increased the number of students completing its programs by 23 percent over a recent five year period, a significant achievement and the biggest improvement out of the top 10 community colleges recognized today by the Aspen Institute. WKCTC makes concerted efforts to continually improve student success, using information on student learning and completion to improve the ways programs are taught and structured. For example, the college provides advising to help students select a major because students with a declared major are more likely to finish. By focusing on what’s working and fixing what isn’t, WKCTC is helping more of its students earn the degrees and certificates that lead to jobs and economic stability.

Nearly half of all college students attend community college, with more than six million students—youth and adult learners—enrolling in America’s nearly 1,200 community colleges every year. Community colleges are also educating rapidly growing lower-income and Hispanic student populations and for millions of Americans represent their most promising path to education that leads to professional employment.

With four-year colleges and universities costing from \$10,000-\$60,000 per year

per student, community colleges are growing at over four times the rate of four-year colleges, serving as the most affordable option in higher education for millions of people in this country.

The growth in community colleges reflects a consensus in the public about the importance of higher education. The Gallup Organization and Lumina



Foundation recently released a poll showing 95 percent of Americans believe a college degree is important to financial security. “Practically everyone can see the link between having a college degree and economic stability. Recognizing and encouraging community college excellence is critical to helping more Americans get the skills they need, especially in difficult economic times,” said Wyner.

The 10 community colleges selected to be finalists today reflect the diversity of America—from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College to Florida’s Miami Dade College (the largest institution in American higher education with nearly 100,000 students) and from Walla Walla Community College in Washington to Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, South Dakota. Other top 10 schools, besides WKCTC, include Mott Community College in Flint, Michigan; Northeast Iowa Community

College in Calmar, Iowa; Santa Barbara City College in Santa Barbara, California; Southwest Texas Junior College in Uvalde, Texas; and Valencia College in Orlando, Florida.

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program had selected seven other KCTCS colleges among the nation’s 120 best community colleges, the top 10 percent in the country. The colleges include Ashland Community and Technical College, Big Sandy Community and Technical College, Hazard Community and Technical College, Madisonville Community College, Maysville Community and Technical College, Somerset Community College, and Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College.

The 10 finalists named from the 120 were selected by a nine-member Finalist Selection Committee, comprised of former community college presidents, respected researchers, and policy experts. They identified institutions that deliver exceptional and improving completion rates and labor-market and learning outcomes following a review of new data collected from applications submitted by eligible institutions in June.

Aspen’s Wyner emphasized that this competition offers an unprecedented opportunity to spotlight and celebrate excellence at a time when community college success is more important to the nation than ever before. “It’s pretty simple, but the stakes are high,” he said. “In an era where a college degree is the ticket to the middle class, real educational opportunity for our citizens and real economic growth for our country will depend on our community colleges.”

